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ABSTRACT

The information in this report is condensed from the presentations and conversations, both formal and informal, that occurred during the 60th meeting of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). About 1,500 librarians attended, representing Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia. Training for preservation administrators and preservation technicians was identified as a high priority need in Latin America. Because of the need for training, Latin American librarians were eager for current preservation literature. Maintenance and storage environments were also priority concerns; however, the breakdown of acidic papers was scarcely mentioned. Biological pests are perceived as a greater hazard in tropical environments. Of secondary priority, the conference participants recognized reformatting and bibliographic control, connectivity through new technologies, and opportunities for creative projects. (SLD)

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Preservation Priorities in Latin America

A Report from the Sixtieth IFLA Meeting Havana, Cuba

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July 1995

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by Dan C. Hazen

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COMMISSION PREFACE

This report is one of a series on preservation and access initiatives abroad. Its distribution now is timely, since it provides background and rationale for the International Program's increasing activities in Latin America.

When the sixtieth meeting of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) was scheduled to take place in Havana, Cuba, in August 1994, the Commission on Preservation and Access contracted with Dr. Dan C. Hazen, Librarian for Latin America, Spain, and Portugal, Harvard College Library, to meet there with as many Latin American library leaders as possible. The goal was to gather information on the possibilities and capabilities for preservation programs in that part of the globe. The librarians' reflections reveal, once again, that preservation on an international scale cannot consist simply of uncritically extending approaches used by developed nations to other countries and regions. Training in basic preservation procedures likewise remains a high priority.

Hazen's gathering of information at IFLA was one of three recent Commission explorations of Latin American preservation needs. The Commission also attended the fifth assembly of the Association of Iberoamerican National Libraries (ABINIA) in Santo Domingo (August 1994), and visited the National Library of Venezuela (July 1994).

Discussions of possible initiatives in Latin America will continue at this year's ABINIA meeting in Mexico City (September 1995). In the meantime, the Commission has developed a contract with the National Library of Venezuela for the creation of an automated register of microform masters held by Venezuelan libraries. The purpose is to establish the capacity to receive bibliographic records of filmed items from other Latin American countries and to share these records with libraries in the United States and elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

The information in this report is condensed from numerous presentations and conversations, both formal and informal, that occurred during the sixtieth meeting of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) in Havana, Cuba, August 1994.[1] About 1,500 librarians attended IFLA, including at least 500 from Cuba. Less numerous but still sizeable contingents hailed from Venezuela and Mexico, while smaller groups travelled from Argentina, Peru, and Colombia. These librarians expressed the following preservation concerns.

High Priority
- Training
- Current knowledge and literature
- Storage environments

Secondary Priority
- Reformatting and bibliographic control
- Connectivity through new technologies

This report treats these topics in turn and then considers some of the opportunities they present.

TRAINING

For the most part, Latin American institutions need training for both preservation administrators and preservation technicians. Librarians repeatedly requested up-to-date information on procedures, equipment, and supplies. A ten-minute workshop demonstration of how to clean dust from dirty books was received with rapt attention. In addition to questions about specific tasks, many librarians sought information on how to construct preservation programs and develop preservation strategies.

Attendees were unclear as to how training might best be provided. Many seemed to favor in-country workshops and short courses. Some looked to improved offerings in Latin America's library science programs. Others perceived a role for more sophisticated training abroad, most frequently for preservation managers and for high-level library administrators needing some familiarity with preservation issues.

In one session, Australia's Wendy Smith, an IFLA Vosper Fellow, spoke of an incipient distance-education program for Oceania and Southeast Asia. She was at that time developing fifteen instructional modules on preservation; the pressing question concerned how to provide a corps of tutors at a central institution. The model, which was received with interest, may be applicable to Latin America.

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND LITERATURE

Eagerness for the most current preservation literature is related to the need for direct training. Conference participants asking for current literature ranged from practicing librarians to library science teachers. One professor charged with conservation courses, for instance, sought information on fumigation theory and the use of bleaching agents. The critical need for better information was further demonstrated, however indirectly, in an impromptu workshop presentation on microfilm storage. Although well-intentioned, the presentation did not fully explore appropriate solutions.

Representatives of Venezuela's National Library suggested that more preservation articles be translated into Spanish. The video *Slow Fires*, although originally created for North American audiences, has attracted much attention particularly after copies with Spanish voice-overs were distributed to Latin American national libraries.

STORAGE ENVIRONMENTS

A polite but persistent debate centered on whether to fumigate stack areas to eliminate biological pests (an approach favored by some of the Cuban librarians), or to follow the Venezuelan National Library's emphasis on cleanliness and good ventilation. In either case, the perceived enemies are bugs, dust, vermin, mold, and mildew. Slowing the breakdown of acidic papers was scarcely mentioned. Indeed, some librarians argued that brittle books are a developed-world problem associated with industrial pollution and the temperate zone's sharp seasonal fluctuations in temperature and humidity. The relatively even (albeit quite high) temperatures and humidities of tropical climates encourage biological pests but, by this argument, are not a direct threat to paper.

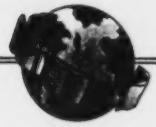
Sophisticated basic research on fumigation agents, including natural pesticides, is being conducted in Cuba. The Venezuelans, by contrast, have emphasized empirical efforts that combine cleaning programs with good ventilation. In other countries, air conditioning is perceived as the solution: one national librarian contemplated a commercial firm's proposal to microfilm all of the country's old newspapers and retain exclusive distribution rights in return for air conditioning the library and providing use copies of the film. The national libraries of Cuba and Venezuela claimed a preponderance of air conditioned stacks. Librarians from other tropical countries countered that air conditioning is a capital- and technology-intensive solution that makes no sense for countries that can't afford it.

Both Cuban and Venezuelan librarians alluded to ongoing efforts to utilize local materials for preservation materials and treatments. The Venezuelans are experimenting with polypropylene for acid-free boxes and containers. This substance is manufactured within the country and available at low cost. Cuba seeks to develop natural fumigants. Many librarians noted the high cost of imported preservation materials and the consequent desirability of local substitutes.

All these environmental concerns can be summarized as follows.

Latin American libraries present a number of storage and environmental problems. Librarians are preoccupied with visible sources of damage, from bugs and mold to pests and dirt. The structural conditions of many libraries (e.g., windows that don't close, leaking roofs or walls) merit priority attention. Shortages of cleaning staff complicate adequate maintenance.

Almost all libraries need to develop and then codify appropriate preservation and maintenance procedures. Most Latin American libraries need information and education concerning the invisible threats — acidic paper, chemical breakdown, and the like — to their collections. Latin American librarians perceive an agenda for basic preservation research that is at once urgent and different from the concerns of preservation specialists in the United States.



REFORMATTING AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL

Reformatting ranked a fairly distant fourth among expressed preservation concerns, with wide variations among countries and institutions. The explanation is as familiar as it is daunting. Many countries lack up-to-date microfilming installations. Spare parts are difficult to obtain, and defective or broken machinery is likely to sit idle. Expensive silver halide film stock must be imported in almost all cases, and dollars are scarce. Film technicians tend to be self-taught. By and large, libraries lack appropriate microfilm storage facilities, yet in tropical climates there is real danger that the film will become unusable. Many repositories have neither space, staff, nor equipment to support researchers needing to work with film. There are a few notable exceptions, among them the national libraries in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela, and the library at the University of Puerto Rico. Most other countries are currently unable to produce film.

Even where film is being prepared, criteria for what to preserve may be uncertain. For example, Venezuela has chosen to microfilm its rare books, primarily so that local students and scholars can consult the film rather than original volumes. However, many of these materials have been filmed elsewhere, and at least some of the duplication is probably unnecessary.

Conference participants placed little premium on knowing about microfilm available from other countries. Those institutions engaged in microfilming generally focus on strictly local priorities. Bibliographic control similarly obeys local standards and criteria for access. (In a few cases, such as the University of Puerto Rico, bibliographic control also provides a foundation for external microfilm marketing.) Where an institution has set high standards for bibliographic control, thorough online records are provided. In other cases, there may be no bibliographic control whatsoever. One national library's microfilm for some newspaper holdings was reportedly prepared in random order, with no guide to indicate specific reel contents: users must scroll through the entire collection to find what they seek. At the same time, librarians were almost universally receptive to improved bibliographic control once they understood the benefits.

Increasing awareness of the utility of bibliographic control is matched by improving capabilities. The Association of Iberoamerican National Libraries (ABINIA), with its membership of libraries from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, Portugal, and Catalonia, has taken the lead with a project to document older (pre-1800) books. One IFLA participant described the technical difficulties that arose during early stages of this endeavor. Each participating library was expected to supply bibliographic information on materials held within its country. The initial submissions quite commonly deviated from agreed-upon standards in such areas as tape formats, record structures, tagging and coding, and descriptive cataloging. The task of reconciling anomalies fell to Spain's National Library. The process was nonetheless both positive and productive. Most libraries rectified problems when their records were returned for corrections. More significantly, the errors were not repeated. Participation in the project remains consistently high, and additional data (on both tapes and worksheets) continue to arrive.

A very few librarians mentioned digitization as a reformatting option. Brazil's National Library had reportedly received outside funds to digitize its holdings of music and maps, although additional details were not available. One Cuban librarian talked enthusiastically about applying limited preservation resources to digitize holdings without worrying about permanent archival microfilm. Spain has engaged in a number of digitization projects, and Mexico has active CD-ROM operations at both the Universidad de Colima and the National University (UNAM).

CONNECTIVITY THROUGH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Librarians attending preservation sessions appeared unaware of new technologies and their implications for preservation. The level of familiarity was low, even in institutions with online catalogs and other electronic capabilities. Many participants did attend a day-long workshop on new communications technologies. As a general rule, Latin America's national councils for science and technology are responsible for allocating electronic connections and accounts. They favor researchers, especially those in science and technology. Strategies to connect libraries may be adjusted most fruitfully to these priorities, rather than to new sequences.

OPPORTUNITIES

Cooperative Projects

Preservation was the focus during an IFLA session for leaders of IFLA's Section on Conservation, leaders (or their representatives) from the IFLA PACs, IFLA administrators, and two invited observers. The meeting was convened in order to clarify structural arrangements among the PACs, and between the PAC program and the Preservation Section. Group discussion focused on relations between the "Core Programme" and the Section on Conservation and also on communications channels, funding arrangements, and programmatic expectations for each regional PAC. Participants reviewed the PAC plan for Latin America and the Caribbean ("Plan de acción 1994-1995 del Centro Nacional de Conservación de Venezuela como núcleo IFLA/PAC para Latinoamérica y el Caribe") within this context. The level of interest, as well as specific announcements and the flow of discussion augured well for the future.

ABINIA's project to document pre-1800 books relies on an increasingly sophisticated, distributed system of bibliographic control. The model suggests that a Latin American Register of Microform Masters also could be devised. The latter product would have immediate utility outside the region and would in all probability attract orders for microfilm and interest in additional filming. Programs that build upon institutions with existing solid microfilming efforts and that encourage integration within international preservation initiatives appear to be both feasible and necessary. Such programs also would comprise a Latin American response to UNESCO's "Memory of the World" project.

Librarians would welcome a study of Latin American microforms (and perhaps of library holdings more generally) within the region. There is some concern that important Latin American collections have been acquired by institutions abroad. In some cases, foreign collections are thought to be far superior to anything in Latin America itself. Although there are certainly strong Latin American collections outside the region, there is little evidence that these are more complete than those within Latin America. To the extent that Latin Americans expect

North American RECON[2] and preservation efforts to save their own bibliographic heritage, they may fail to prevent the destruction of materials that they alone possess. Additional knowledge would enable more balanced perceptions and appropriate action.[3]

Training Initiatives

Continuing training support through workshops and seminars within Latin America, as well as through internships and extended training programs for selected library leaders, is essential. It eventually may prove feasible to adapt the Australian distance-learning effort to Latin America, although that endeavor is still only taking shape. An effort to translate and disseminate current literature likewise would be welcome.

Research

Librarians expressed strong interest in (and need for) preservation products and processes based on local rather than imported materials. A research and information program focusing on these possibilities could be significant. For instance, the Venezuelan use of polypropylene might be applicable in other countries, but additional studies are needed to document more fully any interactions between this substance and book materials. Cuba's efforts to develop natural pesticides and fumigants might be extended. Experiments with fans and careful stack maintenance might be studied rigorously as a means for low-cost environmental control.

The rather common contention that book papers have not deteriorated significantly in the face of tropical heat and humidity (at least without the intervention of other agents) could also be verified. It might be worthwhile to explore air conditioning possibilities that are more efficient and less costly than those now available. The primary concern of Latin American librarians is to find manageable ways to control the environments in which their books are housed. A coordinated and distributed research initiative to identify specific problems and study possible solutions is important.

In conclusion, the librarians who attended the 1994 IFLA conference, while variously trained and informed, were without exception committed to finding ways to maintain their printed heritage. They expressed a desperate need for more information, conveyed through training, literature, and translations. They likewise seek products, processes, and solutions that will work in institutions with very limited resources.

ENDNOTES

1. One of the several "core programmes" of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) concerns Preservation and Conservation (PAC). The PAC program was was officially created during the IFLA meeting in Nairobi in 1984 to focus efforts on issues of preservation and initiate worldwide cooperation for the preservation of library materials. See: The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, IFLA Core Programme: Preservation and Conservation (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1995).

2. RECON: the retrospective conversion of library catalog cards.

3. *Author's Note*: The same mistaken impression may lead the North American library community to conclude that virtually everything of interest is already held in the United States — and that Latin American preservation is therefore a secondary concern for North American librarians and scholars. Fuller awareness of materials in Latin American libraries will enable better overall strategies for preservation and access. *Editor's Note:* Parallel studies have already been conducted in the United States. For an assessment of microforms, see Dan C. Hazen, *The Production and Bibliographic Control of Latin American Preservation Microforms in the United States* (Washington, DC: The Commission on Preservation and Access, 1991). The Association of Research Libraries (ARL), in conjunction with the Association of American Universities and as part of its Foreign Acquisitions Project, elicited reports on current acquisitions from Argentina and Mexico. Substantial gaps were apparent in both cases. ARL also supported a study on retrospective holdings of high-profile Latin American materials that, by contrast, indicated fairly strong coverage. See Dan C. Hazen, *The Bibliographic Control and Preservation of Latin Americanist Library Resources: A Status Report with Suggestions* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1994). More specialized surveys indicate very weak North American coverage for more exotic retrospective materials. For example, see Dan C. Hazen, *Bibliography and Peruvian Union List of Serial Publications from Southern Peru, 1880-1995: Departments of Arequipa, Cuzco, and Puno*... (Berkeley, CA: Center for Latin American Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1988).

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